THE HISTORY OF AN AVOCATION

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My retirement as director of The Mount Sinai Hospital would not have been an unexpected event if I lived long enough to reach the age set for retirement in the *Rules and Regulations* adopted by the hospital Board of Trustees. It was the routine practice of the trustees to appoint staff members who reached the age of retirement to the position of consultant. In my case, the new appointment read "Consultant to the Board of Trustees."

Dr. Carl Koller, the famous ophthalmologist, said that "a consultant is someone who is not consulted." With this prospect in mind, I felt that my cello and a huge backlog of reading would suffice to occupy my time. It happened however that, for reasons to appear later, the musical part of the plan was no longer feasible. But in the first few years the retirement turned out to be gradual; much energy was devoted to plans for a new building for the hospital. However, an alternative to the cello had developed. This was not planned, but arose through a combination of events and associations.

But let me go back some years to show how I arrived at a time when the major activity of my retirement turned out—unexpectedly—to be the photography of works of art in color.

When I was at school and college I had no special interest in the graphic or plastic arts. In fact, I recall only one semester given to this subject; all we had was a series of lectures on Greek and Roman antiquities, illustrated with black and white slides. I did have a camera, a small two-dollar Brownie with which I photographed members of my family and friends.

Looking back I now believe that there must have been an underlying inclination toward the graphic arts; this became overt later when I was invited by Dr. S. S. Goldwater to come to New York as an assistant director of The Mount Sinai Hospital. I had already become interested in music, and during college days I had taught myself to play the mandolin. I learned to play classical violin music on it, music by the

masters: Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and others. At one of the hospital's annual alumni parties I was scheduled to give "An Imitation of Fritz Kreisler" on the mandolin. Indeed, I attempted and carried off the Bach Concerto for Two Violins in D minor, with the assistance of the late Dr. Louis Gross, the hospital pathologist, also a mandolinist. Some members of the hospital staff arranged chamber music concerts in their homes, where we were frequent guests. On one such occasion a doctor cellist, looking at my hands, said that I could and should play the cello; be offered to give me some elementary lessons. I bought a cello for $35.00 and began instruction with this volunteer teacher. But the exigencies and emergencies of practice made his teaching somewhat uncertain. Then I arranged to take weekly 45-minute lessons from a professional cellist from one of the orchestras. After three months my instructor started me on chamber music, beginning with the piano trios of Haydn. This progressed until I was playing more complicated compositions. By this time I had purchased a fine cello made by Fleury in 1758. A friend who collected musical instruments lent me for several years a famous Guadagnini cello, two Stradivarius violins, and a magnificent Gasparo da Sola viola, these to be used in our home by our professional musician friends who came frequently to play chamber music.

Eventually, with the help of other doctors, I organized a home quartet, and we played every Sunday morning in my home. Our repertoire grew steadily until it included more than 75 compositions—trios, quartets, quintets, sextets, with or without the piano, compositions by Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms, Mendelsohn, Dvorak, Schubert, Debussy, Franck, and others. And this activity, I expected, would occupy me on retirement.

What had this to do with the photography of masterpieces of art? To explain, I return to my work at the hospital. When Dr. Goldwater retired and I succeeded him as director, I was brought into direct and frequent contact with George Blumenthal, president of the hospital. In his beautiful home at 70th Street and Park Avenue he housed his wonderful collection of art, more than 600 items. I was in his home once or twice every week on hospital business, and this went on for many years until his death. Thus I often saw his collection, most of which is now in the Metropolitan Museum. Further, Mr. Blumenthal was president of the museum, and so my appreciation of art advanced along with my musical activities.

I frequently spent vacations abroad and visited the major museums in England and in all countries of the Continent. Advice as to what to see often came to me from Mr. Blumenthal. Then several unplanned events occurred which turned me to the photography of art. On our travels I carried a Leica camera in order to record my trips. In one city the camera was dropped by an attendant and was damaged. After this I was naturally reluctant to check my camera in a museum if I could avoid doing so. Carrying it into the Louvre one day I saw a notice: *Photographie Billet 50 fr.* Since I was accustomed to give a tip of this amount for checking the camera I elected instead to pay the 50 fr. and to carry the camera with me. When I reached the Long Gallery upstairs I was impressed by the good light that came from above through the skylights and I used the camera to make a few general shots of the gallery and also a few of the paintings in Kodachrome color. The results amazed me. The transparencies were beautiful and exciting. And so I was trapped. I came back again and again and took more and more photographs of the paintings. But this was possible only during vacations, since work at the hospital kept me very busy. Photography had to give way, especially during the war when I was organizing the Third General Hospital for service in Africa and France.

Music continued, but at reduced tempo. Then came a more serious personal handicap. I developed arthritis in the fingers of the hands, which gave me pain when I played the cello, and I was compelled to stop. But I could still use the camera, and when the war ended and travel abroad was resumed, the camera came back into use and took the place of the cello as an interest.

Up to this time, the photography had been for my own use and pleasure and for that of my family and a few interested friends. One day a member of the staff of the Metropolitan Museum was present and saw the slides. He called them unique and superior to many then in the slide library at the museum. He said he had been asked to give a lecture at the museum but had demurred. Now, he said, if he might borrow these slides he would give the lecture. He did this, before an audience of more than 700, and received a standing ovation. He repeated the lecture in other cities, and later in England, with additional slides.

With the passing of time and with increased experience my techniques improved, and the Kodachromes became better in quality. Beginning with a 50-mm. lens on the Leica, I added several more lenses, one

a 35-mm. wide-angle, another a 90-mm. (which was used most), and also a 135-mm. For darker locations and for hand-held photographs where I could not use a tripod, I acquired a fast *f*1.5 lens. Later I added other cameras and lenses.

Most museums in this country permit photography under certain conditions. Other museums here and abroad that restrict photography granted me permission on my assurance that the photographs would not be published without their consent, that they would not be used for any commercial purpose, that they were for my personal use except when borrowed by college and museum curators to illustrate lectures. With this assurance, I obtained permission to photograph works of art even in the Vatican and also in many private collections here and in Europe which are not open to the public. Among these private collections were those of the late Robert Lehman, the late Adele Levy, Paul Mellon, and many others. Several years ago I also received official permission from the Soviet government to photograph works of art in its museums.

A few years ago the Metropolitan Museum elected me a Fellow of the museum, which made me a member of the corporation, and I am now a member of one of the board's committees dealing with matters of the slide collection. It is probably because of this that I am now listed in *Who's Who in American Art.*

Ultimately I reached the age for retirement at the hospital. Now I had more time for the photography of paintings, drawings, sculptures, churches, and other works of art. The collection of slides grew and now runs into the thousands. These slides are now borrowed by many lecturers not only at the Metropolitan and other museums, but also by teachers at Columbia, New York University, and other colleges and universities. In addition, hundreds of these slides have been donated to museums and universities. Certain originals and duplicates of originals have been requested of me by the Louvre in Paris, the Uffizi in Florence, by museums in England, Rome, Holland, and elsewhere. Some have been used to illustrate books and some have been shown on television.

A number of churches, synagogues, and general cultural organizations have asked me to show the slides and to talk about them. I was asked to give a talk at a county medical society in another city, and was

told that it was the only nonmedical lecture the society had ever scheduled.

This is sharing my avocation with others in several ways. My family and friends see these slides in my home and in theirs. Our grandchildren are receiving a private and personal introduction to good art. Now the audiences have become larger. Many of the lecturers at the Metropolitan Museum use the slides and sometimes this is mentioned at the lectures. My files are heavy with appreciative letters and comments on the slide collection.

Retirement from The Mount Sinai Hospital, where I had had an active full-time career, has not left me at loose ends. I do not cast about for something to fill my days. I find that the available hours are too few. The photography and the work on the slides occupy a great deal of time. Many of my retired medical colleagues consider me fortunate in this respect, not only because of the avocation as such, but because it is something that is shared with other persons.

This satisfying avocation can be enjoyed by anyone who has a good camera and an interest in art. The Metropolitan Museum is a wonderful and endless source of suitable objects. A few technical elements must be observed and they can be mastered early. If any of my medical colleagues wish guidance on them, I shall be glad to help.